

Michigan Freedom Trail Commission Report to the Governor and the Legislature 2019

The Michigan Freedom Trail Commission (FTC or Commission) was established by Public Act 409 of 1998. Its first appointees were made in 2002. Since that time, it has worked to preserve, protect, and promote the legacy of the Underground Railroad in Michigan.

The FTC met quarterly in 2019. The meetings were held in Lansing at the Michigan History Center, except for one which was held at The Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History in Detroit. Regional collaboration continued with commissioners recruiting interested individuals to join four sub-committees. These sub-committees include:

- Site Identification, Facilities, and Programs
- Cultural and Heritage Tourism
- Preservation and Support
- Education

Fifteen people volunteered to participate in the work of the sub-committees under the leadership of the commissioners.

In October, the commission hosted a one-day convening of forty-seven people from across the state who are interested in the topic of Michigan's Underground Railroad. The workshop began with informative sessions by Dr. Deanda Johnson, director of the National Park Service Network to Freedom Program, on the subject of "Slave Stampedes" and Dr. Roy Finkbine, professor of history and director of the Black Abolitionist Archive at the University of Detroit Mercy, discussing "The Native American Underground Railroad in the Midwest". The second session was a review of the videos created by local participants in the Digital Storytelling Workshop that preceded the conference and focused on personal connections to the history of resistance to slavery.

The afternoon sessions were small-group discussions covering four topics that corresponded with the sub-committee work. The sessions included:

- Conducting Local Underground Railroad Research
- Developing Site Nominations
- Cultural Tourism and the Underground Railroad
- Teaching the Underground Railroad

These sessions were conducted simultaneously with scribes to create summaries of the discussions that will be sent to participants.

Between meetings, commissioners continued to work on research and educational materials. Their activities included writing and reviewing articles for publication, lectures to community organizations, participation in panel discussions and other activities promoting the work of the Michigan Freedom Trail Commission.